



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1885-10-04

Letter from John Muir to Louie [Strentzel Muir], 1885 Oct 4.

John Muir

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Recommended Citation

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9.30 P.M.
Sunday
Kansas City Oct 4, 1885
803 Wabash Avenue

Dear Louie. We three boys
& three girls were with father
today. He is still alive, but
has failed greatly since I
last saw him a week
ago. He cannot now speak
so as to be understood though
he tries hard & seems to know
in a general way what is
going on at his bedside.
This morning Mary's little
boy came to the bedside &
he made signs for me to hold
him up to be kissed. Short lived
gleams of recognition are
followed by clouds of sleepy
feebleness deepening into
complete insensibility. I
darkness like feeble rays
of light from the moon coming

01199

Through drifting clouds
I am glad that I got
Dan to come to make as
sure as I could that
everything possible was being
done to soothe these last
sad childish days of old
age. As well as to gather
once more about him.

I don't think he recognized
Dan at all though he gave
some faint signs of knowing
that last but for a moment

Dan says that he may last
a week possibly more but
is liable to pass away at any
moment. Two or three spoonfuls
of oatmeal gruel or oatmeal
tea rather is all the nourish-
ment he takes. He crawls
in sympathy like an affectionate
child & loves to be soothed by
holding his hand & shaking

his brow. ³This afternoon he
gazed keenly with con-
-centrated attention into my
face & drew me down with
a low moaning sound to kiss
him & held my hand for a
long time & would not let me
go. When I said "I want to get
you a spoonful of water father"
he shook his head feebly &
begged by signs for me to
lie down on the other side
of the bed with him. & when
I did so he closed his eyes
& then kept making conscious-
ness & looking to see that I
was there & grasping for me
with the hand next me. As
this is unusual with him I
think that he knows faintly
who I am. We rode all last
night to same time & did not
sleep so we are nervous

I tried. Your telegram
was received on my
arrival here though sent
to an old address. The present
address is at the head of this
letter. You are all very kind
to me in your willingness to
carry my burdens & I shall
do as you say stay with my
poor father to the end. Dan will
come to the funeral & so will
Maggie & John R. I want
mother to come as soon as
possible & will call her
by telegram today. She ought
to have been here weeks ago
but I am afraid she will
not be able to endure the
fatigue of the journey as
she is not used to travel
& ~~weak~~ too is so feeble. I
fear she will not be able
to come though more likely

to try. If ³ these two could
come then we would
all be together once more
which would likely be
the only time in this world.
Mary says she often wishes
this world were made
smaller so that separations
so wide would not be possible.
David & Mary intended to
leave here for home tom-
orrow morning but I hope
to hold them for a few days
to await changes. In case
Mother telegraphs she will
try to come. David will
meet her in Chicago.

4 P.M.
Monday Oct 5. Father had difficulty
in breathing last night but calmed
towards morning. All today he has
been restless & in every way seems
weaker. Has not tried to speak.

01199

at all. I have been thinking
of calling in a photographer,
as no portrait of any sort
of him has ever been
made. But Mary has just
completed a crayon sketch
partly from memory. That
is better than a photograph
now he is so emaciated &
his features all over shadowed
by death. She is going
to make a copy for me.
The other boys ought to
have made arrangements
for an instantaneous picture
years ago that he need
never have known of.
The command "Thou shalt
not make unto thee any
graven image or likeness
of any thing etc" was his
ground of dislike of pictures
in general.

Tell Wanda that papa is
very anxious to see his little
girl & that he will be glad
to get home. & that Maggie
has given me a pair of mittens
for baby's little hands & May
Kew gave me a nice silver cup
with a pretty flower on it
for baby. & lots of other
things & I'll bring them
all home to her. Little
Ethel is a good girl a year
younger than Wanda & would
like to know her cousin
& play with her & some day
she is coming to California
to see her soon. & lots of
nice boys that she will some
day see. Farewell Louie
I'll write again soon & keep
you advised Love to your Mother
& Father Ever Yours John Muir.

803 Wabash Avenue,
Kansas City, Oct. 4, 1885.
Sunday, 9:30 P.M.

Dear Louie,

We three boys and three girls were with father today. He is still alive, but has failed greatly since I last saw him a week ago. He cannot now speak so as to be understood, though he tries hard and seems to know in a general way what is going on at his bedside.

This morning Mary's little boy came to the bedside and he made signs for me to hold him up to be kissed. Short-lived gleams of recognition are followed by clouds of sleepy feebleness, deepening into complete insensibility, and darkness, like feeble rays of light from the moor coming through drifting clouds. I am glad that I got Dan to come to make as sure as I could that everything possible was being done to smoothe these last sad childish days of old age as well as to gather once more about him. I don't think he recognized Dan at all, though he gave some faint signs of knowing that lasted but for a moment.

Dan says that he may last a week, possibly more, but is liable to pass away at any moment. Two or three spoonfuls of oatmeal gruel or oatmeal tea rather is all the nourishment he takes. He craves sympathy like an affectionate child and loves to be soothed by holding his hand and stroking his brow. This afternoon he gazed keenly with concentrated attention into my face and drew me down with a low moaning sound to kiss him and held my hand for a long time, and would not let me go when I said "I want to get you a spoonful of water, father", he shook his head feebly and begged by signs for me to lie down on the other side of the bed with him, and when I did so he closed his eyes and then kept waking to consciousness and looking to see that I was there and groping for me with the hand next me. As this is unusual with him I think that he knows faintly who I am. We rode all last night to save time, and did not sleep so we are nervous and tired.

Your telegram was received on my arrival here, though sent to an old address. The present address is at the head of this letter. You are all very kind, Louie, in your willingness to carry my burdens, and I shall do as you say, stay with my poor father to the end. Dan will come to the funeral and so will Maggie and John R. I want mother to come as soon as possible and will call her by telegram today. She ought to have been here weeks ago, but I am afraid she will not be able to endure the fatigue of the journey, as she is not used to travel. Sarah, too, is so feeble I fear she will not [be] able to come, though more likely to try. If these two could come, then we would all be together once more which would likely be the only time in this world.

Mary says she often wishes this world were made smaller, so that separation so wide would not be possible. David and Mary intended to leave here for home tomorrow morning, but I hope to hold them for a few days to await changes. In case Mother telegraphs she will try to come, David will meet her in Chicago.

Monday, Oct. 5.

4 P.M.

Father had difficulty in breathing last night, but rallied towards morning. All today he has been restless and in every way seems weaker, has not tried to speak at all. I have been thinking of calling in a photographer, as no portrait of any sort of him has ever been made, but Mary has just completed a crayon sketch, partly from memory, that is better than a photograph now he is so emaciated and his features all over-shadowed by death. She is going to make a copy for me. The other boys ought to have made arrangements for an instantaneous picture years ago, that he need never have known of. The command "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or likeness of any thing", etc. was his ground of dislike of pictures in general.

Tell Wanda that papa is very anxious to see his little girl, and that he will be glad to get home, and that Maggie has given me a pair of mittens for baby's little handies, and May Reid gave me a nice silver cup with a pretty flower on it for baby, and lots of other things. I'll bring them all home to her. Little Ethel is a good girl, a year younger than Wanda, and would like to know her cousin and play with her, and some day she is coming to California to see her soon, and lots of nice boys that she will some day see.

Farewell, Louie. I'll write again soon, and keep you advised
Love to your mother and father,

Ever yours,
JOHN MUIR